o promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which here in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization."*

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The Christian Works in a Free Rural India

By Rev. Ralph Richard Keithahn

We live today in a new era - an era of atomic power. No one can conceive what that actually means but we must try. Electric power has already come to the village. For some years it has been in every District of Mysore State. But we have hardly lived as though it were a fact. We are also in a free India - an India that is primarily rural - and most of our Churches are rural. Even those facts do not always seem to be a part of our thinking. Revolutionary thinking and living is needed. Jesus' words are again apt: "Change your mind, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

I find many of us still thinking in terms of the mission which is foreign. We do not seem to realize that the mission is a passing stage - that it is the church which is permanent. I believe this change of view is most important when we deal with the village congregation. And I doubt whether the present Church has generally been organized in the village so that it may be permanent.

Truly our resources are great: If Jesus was right - if his gospel is true - then all needed resources are to be found in the Eternal Godhead. "My power is made perfect in weakness." "Our sufficiency is from God." We must never forget this if we would build on foundations of rock in the village. That recent saint, Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma, brought that truth home to me as I had not known it before when he continually reminded us, "Christ is my all in all." And he lived accordingly. A number of his young men have started Ashrams and centres of work on that basis - with no foreign funds. And they are strong.

But we must also think of the great resources about us in India as we work in the village. They are also immense and scarcely tapped:

The Constructive Program

Never before has a country produced such a fighter for liberty who at

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* Rev. Ralph Richard Keithahn is a missionary of the United Christian Missionary Society (Disciples of Christ) at Ambathurai, Madura District, India. His manuscript appeared originally as Bulletin No. 5 of the India Christian Rural Fellowship. Readers around the world will be interested in Mr. Keithahn's careful appraisal of the Christian rural scene in new India. Reproduced with the kind permission of the author and of the India Christian Rural Fellowship.

the same time evolved such a complete and effective nation-building program as has India. Whether we agree with it or not we must admit there is no other. We had better study it well, understand all its momentous implications, accept or modify it where we think best.

Economic Welfare

First, there are those aspects of the program which deal with the economic welfare of the village. Jesus fed the hungry multitudes. Sensitive Christians are feeding the hungry multitudes again today. But strangely enough Missions in India have generally accomplished little in raising the actual economic level of village Christians, to say nothing of villages as a whole.

I believe it has been sufficiently proved in recent years that few men can be Christlike with empty stomachs. I happened to see the starvation experiment conducted at the University of Minnesota. Two sons of missionaries to India were in that experiment. The diet was better than that of the average villager of South India. And yet there was marked deterioration, even in the earlier stages of the experiment, of the high human relationships.

The village industries program is but an attempt to keep the food and cloth processing in the village itself where there is so much unused labor. And how we need that food and cotton in the village. But how often I hear Christian people saying: "Khadi is uneconomical." "Food can be more cheaply processed in a mill." What are our values? Human or material? Is it not more important to have bran-covered rice for a hungry villager than the polished mill rice? Is it not more valuable for the unemployed villager to spin and weave his own cotton in his leisure moments - develop his personality, use his time valuably, and have cloth to wear which costs him nothing? I am but trying to suggest that in the Constructive Program of Gandhiji we have something to consider very seriously. It is a resource.

Social Welfare

This program is also concerned with the social welfare of society. It promotes definitely the removal of caste. It has a very substantial and universal program for the uplift of women and children. Christianity has always stood for brotherhood although there is much caste in the Church of India. Perhaps we have not realized enough the necessity of removing caste from the entire social body of India before caste will leave the Church. Christians are always concerned with the uplift of women and children. But are we a part of the national program as much as we ought to be?

New Education

Again, the Constructive Program thinks in terms of revolutionary educational change. It might well do so. The Christian Church in India has pioneered in education. But in the recent generation it has tended to become a slave to Government redtape and grants. All too often our Christian institutions have become great mills turning out thousands of warped personalities who would not be seen cleaning a dirty village street although the latter is essential if we are to have a great nation. Basic Education again, whether good or bad, demands our serious consideration. We must accept or modify it that it may serve village conditions better if we are to make a substantial

contribution to the elimination of ignorance in India. Experimentation has been going on now for several years. A great body of experience has been evolved. Thousands of schools are functioning. But Christian education is very largely outside of this pioneering. We must get into the stream of creative living again in the Indian village.

Human Values First

It should not be necessary to remind a Christian that with Jesus and with His Church human values ever came first. "You cannot serve God and Mammon." But so many of us have been so dominated by the materialistic development of the West - by the emphasis placed upon things by a gadget civilization - that we do not seem to be able to comprehend the importance of the Constructive Program in its stress on human values. In the struggle for freedom, listen to Gandhi! "Do not hate the Britisher; he is our brother." Or "Do not hate the Zemindar or Prince; they are God's children as we are. Hate the system of exploitation and get rid of it!" This emphasis is unique among world leadership today. When it ought to be coming from our Churchills, Roosevelts and Chiang Kai Sheks we find it in our very midst! But because Gandhi does not happen to be a Christian we have difficulty in recognizing the true Christian aspect of his call. Dr. Albert Schweitzer has been saying that "reverence for life" was the heart of the Christian ethic and so badly needed in the world today. This is exactly the heart of the Constructive Program.

Ours Is A Spiritual Leadership

Nowhere else in all the world today is there a national leadership such as we have in Gandhi, the author of India's liberty and nation-building program. The Christian surely is convinced that any program of human welfare must be of the Kingdom if it is to be lasting. I know our theological difficulties. But I suggest that we put those aside for the moment and recognize things for what they are. The national leader says that his way of life demands a faith in God. One cannot be a true Satyagrahi unless he starts with that faith. In Gandhi's own life there is a relentless search for Truth. When most of us are still sleeping he is up and at prayer. He finds a day of silence necessary every week. All over the country I find his nation-building cells.

I cannot remember a single instance where the devotional life was not a part of the life of these concentrated groups. And yet when recently I was taking a few classes in a Christian institution and started those classes with prayer the students thought it very strange although they were all Christian: What did Jesus say about those who cried, "Lord! Lord!" and did not his will and those who did his will but did not pretend to be following him. Whatever that may be, I think it is our duty to recognize that we do have essentially a spiritual movement heading in the right direction. It is not for us to stand off and criticize but rather to get in and make our unique contribution, if we have one to make, as I believe we have.

The Rich Culture of India

As Christians we are again fortunate in having the rich culture of India to build upon. When Christianity left the shores of Palestine it was most fortunate that it could enter a world of Greek culture. It made the most of that culture and I believe rightly so. But in India we have been taught to think

of the culture as pagan. A foreign rule whether political or religious has not helped us to know the great culture of India. But there is much that can be helpful to us. May I simply make a few suggestions where I believe we must yet dig deeply to comprehend all the truth India has for us. There is that realm of India's culture which centers about the concept "Satya." Jesus came saying: "I am the Truth!" India has been also searching for the Truth. Gandhi's life has been an "Experiment with Truth." This emphasis is most important. We can use it. We can work with it. We can help to make it a more vital part of India's life today. Then "Ahimsa." God is love! Jesus' way was that to Calvary. I am not suggesting that "Ahimsa" is equivalent to the Cross. But I am suggesting that the ahimsa culture of India is closer to the Cross than the present war culture of the West. The Christian has not yet become fully aware of this resource and its place in his own nation-building - or should I say - man-building work.

Old thought forms are ever changing as they meet new conditions and it is our duty to see that they develop in the most creative directions. But I cannot see how we can have true democracy unless we have democratic units or villages in India. Those villages cannot be free and democratic unless they are reasonably "self-sufficient." In the West I find a strong movement towards decentralization. I find outstanding thinkers and constructive workers such as A. E. Morgan of T. V. A. fame giving their full time to the development of community living - based on an economy of decentralization. The village republic emphasis in India is, I believe, another aspect of the "true community" movement of the western world.

The Simple Life

Again, the genius of the good man in India is to live the simple life. The Son of Man had no place to lay his head. He went about doing good. That has been true of the best in India's life whether it was the older Buddha or the modern Gandhi. I believe that the best in the Christian tradition have been of the way of simple living: the St. Francises, the Kagawas, the Charlie Andrews. But the normal Christian institution tends to be anything but simple - tends to produce workers who are so often more interested in salary and increments than in the work of the Kingdom. I am trying to say that Christians would do well to rediscover the sacrificial elements in their own Christ and bring them into the common fellowship as a New India is built.

And What Are We To Do Now?

We shall study, understand, and cooperate with the Constructive Program. It is the only program we have as yet. It is not a fixed program. It is always changing. It is for us to get into the work and help to modify it for the best. Christians like J. C. Kumarappa, Aryanayagam and several others have been doing this but all too often they are suspected by the Christians. That day should now be over. Revolutionary thinking and action is necessary - on the part of the Christian as well as of others.

We ought to be at the job of producing more food, clothing and houses in the village. I am not interested in producing honey or eggs or cotton for the cities alone. But I am earnestly desirous of getting more food into the stomach of all villagers and of our village Christians if we are to have a real village Church.

We shall work for a "casteless, classless society" as Gandhi has called us to do - or better still as our own Savior has called us to do but we do not: I believe it is a fact that caste and class have been found in their worst aspects in so-called Christian countries: White Christian churches will not allow colored Christians to worship with them in several parts of the U. S. A. and South Africa! Too much of that spirit is still with us in the Christian Church of India.

Some of the worst economic exploitation has been done by members of the Christian Church. I have been in Christian groups in India where we voted against a living wage for the builders of the bungalow when the labor market made it possible for us to exploit labor! There will be a real revolution for most of us if we love the laborer - especially the sweeper and kitchen servant as ourselves!

Finally, beware of secularization. Conditions have forced a secular State upon India. The West has rapidly become secularized. The dangers are great in a secular society. We must not allow our own lives to become mammon-centered. We must learn to be one with every Seeker of Truth. There must be respect for every sincere religious person. We have <u>One</u> Father. He loves us all. He has sent His revealing and strengthening Spirit into the heart of every earnest searcher for Truth. I believe it is only in that spirit that we all can come close to the feet of Christ. India's best is essentially religious. I believe that in such a spirit we may be making our most effective witness of The Way of life. I am convinced that the followers of Jesus never had greater opportunities - greater resources with which to work - than they do today in realizing the Kingdom of God in the 700,000 villages of India. And when that is done they will be making a supreme contribution to the needs of a world now strangled by war, exploitation and selfishness.

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